PROCESSED
JUL 07 2006
GTU LIBRARY

Letter from Taizé
n° 249 Bimonthly 0,50 euro August – September 2006 / 4

"Widen the Space in Your Tent!"

From 28 December 2006 until 1 January 2007, Zagreb, capital of Croatia, is being called, in the words of the prophet Isaiah, to "widen" the space in which it lives, in order to welcome thousands of young people from the whole of Europe and beyond. This letter would like to reveal a bit more of the life of the Croatian people and suggest some ways of preparing for this latest stage in the pilgrimage of trust in 2006.

Travelogue

One of the brothers has recently made several journeys through Croatia. Here are a few of his impressions as he travelled around. It is not easy to put into a few words how people live, but several of the character traits of the Croatians make you think a lot about our pilgrimage of trust: the hospitality, a daily life rooted in faith, a "village" life which persists even after generations of living in the city, curiosity about others… We will limit ourselves to describing just these aspects.

The train leaves the tunnel passing through the southern Alps. The brand-new locomotive and the restaurant car are only just coupled up and already the barman comes past: "*Kava, kava …*". The aroma of Turkish coffee wafts through the air, a legacy of the Ottoman presence in the region for several centuries. In less than three hours we have crossed Slovenia and we arrive at what is still, for the moment a least, the external border of the European Union. "Welcome to Croatia!" What is waiting for us on the other side?

A country so close and yet surprisingly little known

I may not be the only person to remember those wonderful stories of holidays on the Adriatic coast, in a country then called Yugoslavia, the name of which is no longer to be found on any of today's maps. "Of course, most often it is because of tourism that you hear about our little country. This money is very important for our economy. But beyond the economic aspect there is an old tradition of welcoming strangers that can still be felt today." Even the shape of the villages that you come across reinforces this impression: the houses are not grouped around the centre, but they are lined up along the main road, as if everyone wants to see who is passing by, greet them, invite them in.

But, unfortunately, these holiday stories were replaced one day by other news. Suddenly the television started to show pictures of bombed-out villages and destroyed historic monuments. And this wasn't somewhere far off, but a few hours away from us. We didn't really understand: who is against who and why?

A daily life rooted in faith

In very little time the train arrives in Zagreb, "*Glavni Kolodvor*", the central station. On alighting, on the first platform, you go past a tiny chapel next to the trains. Its charm is far from the beauty of the Gothic and baroque churches in the centre of the city, but you see people stop and collect their thoughts for a moment before continuing on their way. Faith is a part of people's lives, just like that,

very naturally. During the last visit of the Pope to Croatia more than half a million people came together in different parts of the country.

"Go and see '*Kamenita Vrata*' (The Stone Gate) in the wall of the Old City". On the flank of one of the two hills that make up the historic centre of Zagreb we find ourselves in this quarter destroyed by a fire in 1731. According to tradition only a picture of the Virgin Mary on the wall of this passage was spared by the fire. Ever since then the city's inhabitants have come here in order to confide their worries or to give thanks to God. You have the impression of going down into a cave, the walls are blackened by permanently lit candles.

Living in the city as in the country …

How is it that faith stays so alive here? On Sundays you see a lot of young people coming out of churches. For them this cannot be just a mere tradition or nostalgia for the past. There must be more to it: maybe the fact that they love life here and you can feel it! Not the noisy life of big cities which make us forget who we are, but the down-to-earth life, with its joys and its pain, our own and those of our neighbours.

When you are the guest of a family, sooner or later you end up talking about "the village", even if it's only to explain where the ham or the fruit on the table came from.

The suburbs of Zagreb are in fact made up of little villages which grew out to meet each other during the last century. Even now the atmosphere is family-like, to the point that you do not feel lost as you can in a big city. Sometimes you will find yourself, in the middle of big blocks of flats, nose to nose with an old village church. There is no clash between the traditional and the modern, the rural and the urban. So, naturally, faith remains at the heart of life, and they love that life.

A people interested in others

The surprising thing is that this love of the earth doesn't lead to being insular. People are interested in what is going on elsewhere. The best illustration of this interest is the Croat passion for reading.

"It's true we read a lot," explains Ana. "My Father, for example, has never studied. He's been a driver all his life, first lorries, then taxis. It's a job with a lot of dead time. So in those long hours of waiting he would read – at least one or two books every week. Now he knows the whole of literature."

The country has always had a tormented history. "We live in one of the youngest states in Europe. For centuries we have lived in various political configurations and our country has never been independent for long. That marks people. Generally people here follow what's going on in the country and abroad. People work a lot, things are still in the process of being rebuilt, the wounds of the past still need healing."

Throughout history, like other peoples in the region, the small Croat nation has had to constantly look for support from others and accept alliances in order to survive. The tumultuous history of the region has contributed to a mixing of populations from different origins. The positive effect of this is that the Croatians have been used to cultivating diversity for centuries, for example they are used to living side by side with Serbian Orthodox, rubbing shoulders with Muslims in the neighbouring country of Bosnia-Herzegovina, living with minorities…

Openness to other cultures is also favoured by the fact that, in the course of history, a lot of Croatians have emigrated: "Two million Croatians live abroad and 4.5 million in Croatia. There are very few families who don't have someone living far away."

During this time of globalisation of our societies and the building of the "global village", we would like to discover even more this Croatian people that has adapted so well to the adventures of history and at the same time stood firm in a way of life marked by solidarity, the capacity to take time, and a faith rooted in society. The meeting in Zagreb at the end of this year will be an occasion to do this. Thanks in advance to the people of Zagreb for inviting us into their "urban village"!

Practical information about the meeting:
www.taize.fr/en; Meeting in Zagreb

Stages of the Preparation for the Pilgrimage to Zagreb

So that the journey to Zagreb can be truly a pilgrimage of trust, it is important to prepare oneself personally, and also as a group. Here are some ideas to help with this preparation during the autumn.

You can meet for a time of prayer together every month (October, November and December), for example. On the Taizé website you will find suggestions for a prayer service using the songs of Taizé, with different voices as well as a choice of texts and prayers for each month.

http://www.taize.fr/en "Prayer and song"

After the prayer, there can be a time of sharing starting from these possibilities:

October: "We are not made to live for ourselves."

- Find one or two people who can talk about their experience last year at the European meeting.
- Read this Bible passage together:

Christ is our peace; in his flesh he has made both groups into one and has broken down the dividing wall, that is, the hostility between us, (…) that he might create in himself one new humanity in place of the two, thus making peace, and might reconcile both groups to God in one body through the cross, thus putting to death that hostility through it. So he came and proclaimed peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near; for through him both of us have access in one Spirit to the Father. So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are citizens with the saints and also members of the household of God. (Ephesians 2:14-19)

- Take time to get acquainted in small groups (8-10 persons): What is my link with the Church, my commitment in it? What do I expect from the European meeting?
- To go deeper into the Bible text: Does this text call my way of life into question? What answer can I make to those who say that our societies are individualistic? Am I familiar with initiatives that bring together people who are different from one another?
- At the end: give each participant a small responsibility for the rest of the time of preparation. Who will take care of the next prayer? Who would be touched by being invited to come with us to Zagreb? How can we make contact with other young people from our church, our diocese, our region, so they can make the journey with us?

For the November meeting, tell everyone to bring one or more photos that best describe what they love about their life (their home, their neighborhood, someone in their family…). These photos can be brought to Zagreb to help those who welcome us understand where we come from.

November: "Good news helps us go forward."

- Share about the photos in small groups.
- Read these Bible passages together:

The light of the eyes rejoices the heart, and good news refreshes the body. (Proverbs 15:30)

When Jesus came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, he went to the synagogue on the sabbath day, as was his custom. He stood up to read, and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor." And he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant, and sat down. The eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him. Then he began to say to them, "Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing." (Luke 4:16-21)

- To go further: In my way of life, in my use of the media, in my discussions with others, how can I not give too much room to pessimistic views? What aspects of the Zagreb meeting can help us to overcome a pessimistic outlook on the world?
- For my luggage: What is the good news of my country, of the place where I live, of my Church that I could bring with me to Zagreb?
- To pay for the journey: Are there people who would like to go to Zagreb but don't have the means financially? What can we do to support them? Look together for ways of sharing the cost of the trip (selling cakes in front of church after Sunday worship, garage sales, doing errands for neighbors, babysitting…) and create a small solidarity fund.

December: "Becoming creators."

- Discovering Zagreb: How can we discover more about the Croatian people? Suggest that two or three people look for information on the culture, language and life of the Church in Zagreb and present it to the group. You can even invite Croats to express what, in their eyes, is the beauty of their nation. Some websites can help you.
- Discovering a Croatian poem:

Servus dragi Zagreb moj
Kaj se skrivaš v megli toj
Kaj da bi se nekaj sramil
Ti se nemaš sramit kaj
I sad sem tu i pak sem tvoj
Servus dragi Zagreb moj
I sad sem tu i pak sem tvoj
Servus dragi Zagreb moj

Ti si lep još kak navek
I Hrvatski prek na prek
Z'dalka si ti mene mamil
Ja sem tebi štel nazaj
Mili Zagreb imam rad
I vu megli bel je sad
Pariz nema kaj ti imaš
Jer si lep i jer si naš.

Greetings, my dear Zagreb,
Hiding in the fog
As if you were ashamed of something.
You need not be ashamed at all.
Now I am here and I am yours,
Greetings, my dear Zagreb.
Now I am here and I am yours,
Greetings, my dear Zagreb.

You are still beautiful, as always,
And Croatian from end to end.
From afar you attracted me,
I wanted to come back to you.
Good Zagreb, I love you well,
And in the fog you are all white.
Paris doesn't have what you have,
For you are beautiful and you are ours.

Why not learn part of this by heart with the help of a Croat?

- Prepare the "festival of nations". The evening of December 31st, after the prayer vigil, in each parish a festival is held during which each country has to present something of its culture. What can we present (song, dance, explanations…)?
- What acts of solidarity can we invent with those who remain home? (Bringing their prayer intentions; sharing our experiences when we return; taking the addresses of people who live alone to send them a message of hope from Zagreb in the name of all those gathered together for peace…)

Check the practical information for the meeting, the contact persons in your region, travel possibilities from different countries on the Taizé website: http://www.taize.fr/en; Meeting in Zagreb

A WORKSHOP IN TAIZÉ

How can we face up to fear for the future?

Meeting with Gérard Daucourt, Bishop of Nanterre (France)

Bishop Gérard Daucourt of Nanterre, near Paris, has visited Taizé many times and has accompanied the community in many stages of its life. During this particular visit he led a workshop on the question: How can we face up to fear for the future? The young French people present wanted to think together about the meaning of the riots that occurred in many neighbourhoods last November, and of the big demonstrations against the new working contracts for young people in March-April.

Some of them said that, rather than expressing specific demands, these two events in France were an expression of the fear for the future that paralyzes certain young people and which they express with such intensity. The workshop was attended by many French young people, but also by Germans, Australians, Americans, and a Colombian. Bishop Daucourt emphasized the fact that he was there to listen and not to analyze. Nevertheless he offered four lines of reflection:

- Might fear of the future be first of all a fear of not being recognized? Many demands are first of all appeals to be loved. Many of the young seem to be saying, "Love us!"
- Fear of the future can come from suspicion of the words of certain adults. "You say this, but we don't believe you!" How can we rediscover a consistency between what we say and what we do? "Do what you say and say what you do."
- Fear of the future can also be first of all fear of ourselves. In the resurrection, there is the possibility to say yes to all that is in me, to all that I am. On the morning of the resurrection, how can we reformulate this great yes to life?
- It is this yes that will enable us to leave behind the artificial securities of a society obsessed with taking no risks. How can we rediscover the taste of adventure, an adventure of generosity not calculated in advance?

BIBLE MEDITATIONS

Matthew 20: 20-28

In every culture there is a system of honoring some of its selected members, distinguishing them from others by means of titles, clothes, posts or material advantages. In both West and East, human beings try to acquire more honor or influence in a given group. The problem is that some use every means possible to acquire them. The struggle for power and various forms of intrigue – manifest or hidden – exist in all human societies. Even the apostles were not totally exempt from it.

Jesus' teaching on power is clear and even radical. He does not simply argue that one must rule differently and more humanly. He goes further, saying that if someone wants to be a leader he or she must be a servant, even a slave! And throughout his life he gave the best example of this. To the prevalent idea of "dominion" of a leader, he contrasted the idea of "service". The "kingdom" that Jesus brings is far different from human expectation or imagination. It must have been difficult for the disciples to grasp and probably even more so to accept it.

Following Christ sometimes means swimming against the current. By asking "Are you able to drink the cup that I am about to drink?" he refers to his passion, the cup he would like most to pass far away from him but finally accepts. In fact, the one who has decided to follow Christ cannot avoid this cup. They may be the target of contradiction as Christ himself was. They may experience misunderstanding, refusal, isolation and humiliation. "You will indeed drink my cup," says Jesus. That is why, to prepare them, he assures his disciples that the Holy Spirit, consoler and helper, will come upon them and dwell within them.

- What can help us assume our responsibility in the Church or in society as a joyful service for others?
- What temptations of power or honor do we encounter in our life? How can we overcome them? How can we give another example of using power?
- When we experience misunderstanding, refusal or failure, how does Jesus' life and death encourage us to go forward instead of giving up?

2 Corinthians 5: 14 -21

A brother who lives in Brazil comments on this text as seen from his vantage-point:

At the beginning of the Church, Christians of Jewish background leapt over the wall that separated them from those from other backgrounds. This meant for them giving up some strict dietary and behavioral rules; it broadened the way they conceived their relationship with God. During the following two millennia, in their practice and teaching, Christians did not always show such boldness in integrating cultural differences.

In Brazil, a powerful trend over the past fifty years has caused the Pentecostal churches to grow to the detriment of the traditional denominations. Most of the converts come from a poor background. After their conversion, they willingly witness to their faith by saying, "I used to be this and that, now I am a new man (or woman) because I have accepted Christ." And they tell you about the features of this "new self" (v.17) that can be seen and verified by all: "I no longer drink. I no longer smoke. I respect my spouse. My children go to school. I am learning to read and write. I go to church all the time…"

In these communities, strong bonds of fellowship unite the members. They help one another, materially as well as morally, to stay on the right road. And yet their attitude towards other churches tends to be one of suspicion, or even of hostility and contempt, as if the work of reconciliation stopped at the door of their own community.

In society and between different countries, as well as among Christians, the natural tendency is to take sides, to accept some and to exclude others. It is difficult not to have any prejudices, "no longer to look at anyone in a human way" (v.16). For that involves becoming aware of one's own limits, realizing that some aspects of my own personality can be difficult for others to accept.

- What prejudices remain in me, in spite of everything?
- Who it is hard for me to be reconciled with? What makes it difficult?
- What experiences of reconciliation have I had?

These Bible meditations are meant as a way of seeking God in silence and prayer in the midst of our daily life. During the course of a day, take an hour or so to read the Bible passage with the short commentary and to reflect on the questions which follow. Afterwards, a group of 3 to 10 people can meet to share what they have discovered and perhaps for a time of prayer.

SEPTEMBER

Holy Spirit, comforting Spirit, remaining in your presence in a peace-filled silence is already prayer. You understand everything about us, and sometimes even a simple sigh can be a prayer.

1 Jr 30:17-22
Fri The Lord says: I shall restore you to health and heal your wounds, and there will be thanksgiving and shouts of joy.

2 Jn 14:18-21
Sat Jesus said to his disciples: In a short time the world will no longer see me, but you will see that I live and you will also live.

3 Jm 1:17-27
SUN James writes: Humbly accept the word planted in you, which can give you life.

4 Mk 6:45-52
Mon When they saw Jesus walking on the water, the disciples were terrified. But at once he spoke to them saying, "Have courage, it's me. Don't be afraid."

5 Ps 119:17-24
Tue Though I am a stranger upon the earth, do not hide your will from me. My soul is consumed with longing for it.

6 Mk 12:1-12
Wed The stone which the builders rejected has become the cornerstone: this is the Lord's doing.

7 Jm 5:13-20
Thu Confess your sins to one another and pray for one another so that you may be healed.

8 Mt 1:16-21
Fri An angel said to Joseph: Mary will bear a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.

9 Ps 36
Sat In you, Lord, is the source of life; in your light we see light.

10 Mk 7:31-37
SUN Jesus took the man who was deaf and could hardly speak aside, away from the crowd. With a deep sigh, Jesus said, "Be opened!" At this, the man's ears were opened, his tongue was loosened and he spoke clearly.

11 Ep 4:1-7
Mon With all humility, gentleness and patience, bear with one another in love. Take every care to maintain the unity of the Spirit by the bond of peace.

12 Lk 16:1-13
Tue Jesus said: No servant can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and Money.

13 Jm 2:1-5
Wed God has chosen those who are poor in the eyes of the world to be rich in faith and to inherit the kingdom he promised to those who love him.

14 Dt 31:1-8
Thu The Lord your God walks with you. God will never leave you or forsake you.

15 2 Tm 1:6-11
Fri Paul writes to Timothy: Share in my sufferings for the Gospel, relying on the power of God who has saved us and called us to be holy.

16 Rm 8:31-39
Sat St. Paul writes: I am certain that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation will be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus.

17 Mk 8:27-35
SUN Jesus asked his disciples, "Who do you say I am?" Peter answered, "You are the Christ."

18 Ps 139
Mon Fathom me, God, and know my heart. Test me, know my thoughts and guide me in the way that is everlasting.

19 Col 1:15-20
Tue God wanted all his fullness to dwell in Christ, and through him to reconcile all things to himself.

20 Is 28:16-17
Wed The Lord says: See, I am laying a foundation stone for my people. And I will take justice for a measure and righteousness as a level.

21 Mt 9:10-13
Thu St MATTHEW Jesus said: I desire mercy, not sacrifice. Indeed, I have come not to call the just, but sinners.

22 Jn 6:41-51
Fri Jesus said: No one can come to me unless drawn by the Father who sent me; and I will raise that person up on the last day.

23 Mt 7:12
Sat Jesus said: Do to others as you would like them to do to you.

24 Mk 9:30-37
SUN Jesus said: Whoever welcomes me does not welcome me but the one who sent me.

25 Mi 7:7-8
Mon I watch in hope for God who will save me. Though I sit in darkness, the Lord is my light.

26 1 S 16:1-13
Tue The Lord said to Samuel: Take no notice of appearance. God does not see as human beings see: they look at appearances but God looks at the heart.

27 Mt 13:31-33
Wed Jesus said: The kingdom of heaven is like the yeast a woman took and mixed in with a large amount of flour until the whole thing rose.

28 1 Co 10:23-31
Thu Let no one seek their own interest, but rather the good of others. Whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God.

29 Ep 6:18-20
Fri Pray in the Spirit at all times. Never tire of praying for all God's people.

30 Mk 5:1-20
Sat Jesus said to the man he had healed: Go home to your people and tell them everything the Lord has done for you in his mercy.

These short readings are those read, day by day, at community prayer in Taizé. The Bible reference given indicates a slightly longer passage.

DAILY READINGS

OCTOBER

Mk 9:38-48
1 SUN Jesus said: If anyone gives you a cup of water to drink because you belong to Christ, then in truth I tell you, they will certainly not lose their reward.

Si 2:1-9
2 Mon You who revere the Lord, wait for his mercy. Do not turn aside from him.

Ac 4:32-34
3 Tue All the first Christians were one in heart and mind. No one claimed private ownership of any possessions, but they shared everything they had.

Jn 3:1-8
4 Wed Jesus said: What is born of the Spirit is spirit. The wind blows where it pleases: you hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with those who are born of the Spirit.

1 Co 10:12-13
5 Thu God is faithful and will not allow you to be tempted beyond your strength. But when you are tempted, God will give you the means to stand up to it and will show you a way forward.

Jn 14:21-26
6 Fri Jesus said: The Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and remind you of everything I have told you.

1 Co 1:26-31
7 Sat God chose things that by human standards are weak to confound the strong. God chose what is lowly and despised in the eyes of the world.

Mk 10:2-16
8 SUN Jesus said: Let the little children come to me, for it is to such as these that the kingdom of God belongs.

1 Th 3:12-13
9 Mon May God make your love increase so that it overflows for each other and for everyone. May God confirm your hearts.

Mk 8:34-37
10 Tue Jesus said: If anyone wants to be a follower of mine, let them renounce themselves and take up their cross and follow me.

Lk 11:9-13
11 Wed Jesus said: Ask, and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened to you.

Is 62:1-5
12 Thu Isaiah said: For the sake of my people, I shall not keep silent. I shall not rest until her justice shines out like the breaking of day. And then all will see your justice, and you will be called by a new name that the mouth of the Lord will bestow.

Lk 12:13-21
13 Fri Jesus said: Be on your guard against every kind of greed; for a person's life does not consist in the abundance of their possessions.

Mt 13:44-46
14 Sat Jesus said: The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field that someone has found; they hide it again, and in their joy sell everything they have and buy that field.

Mk 10:17-22
15 SUN Jesus said to a person who questioned him: You lack one thing. Go, sell everything you have and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me.

Zc 2:14-17
16 Mon The Lord says: On that day many nations will turn to God and will become his people.

Jn 1:14-18
17 Tue No one has ever seen God; it is the only Son, who is at the Father's side, who has made him known.

Lk 10:1-9
18 Wed St LUKE Jesus sent out his disciples saying: Whenever you go into a town where they make you welcome, eat what is set before you; cure the sick who are there and say, "The kingdom of God is very near you."

Mt 5:44-48
19 Thu Jesus said: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be children of your Father in heaven. You must set no bounds to your love, just as your heavenly Father sets none to his.

Ph 3:4-14
20 Fri Paul writes: I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the communion in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, and so somehow to attain to the resurrection from the dead.

Col 1:9-14
21 Sat God has rescued us from the rule of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves, in whom we have forgiveness.

Mk 10:42-45
22 SUN Jesus said to his disciples: You know that in the world rulers lord it over their subjects and make their power felt. This is not to happen among you. No, anyone who wants to be great among you must be your servant.

Mi 4:1-3
23 Mon Days will come when many peoples will come and say, "Let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, so that he may teach us his ways." And they will hammer their swords into ploughshares and their spears into bill-hooks.

Ps 62
24 Tue Trust in God at all times. Pour out your heart to God.

Ac 26:1-23
25 Wed Paul said: I have borne witness to great and small alike, saying that the Christ was to suffer and that, as the first to rise from the dead, he was to proclaim a light for all nations.

Lk 6:27-38
26 Thu Jesus said: Give, and it will be given to you. A full measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over, will be poured into your lap.

Is 55:6-11
27 Fri Turn to God who will forgive freely. For, thus says the Lord, my thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways my ways.

Lk 12:22-32
28 Sat Jesus said to his disciples: Do not be afraid, little flock, for your Father has been pleased to give you the Kingdom.

Mk 10:46-52
29 SUN Jesus asked a blind man, "What do you want me to do for you?" "Rabbi, I want to see", he replied. And Jesus said to him, "Go; your faith has saved you."

Is 11:1-9
30 Mon On that day there shall be no more hurt or violence, for the land will be filled with the knowledge of God as the water covers the bottom of the sea.

1 Tm 1:12-17
31 Tue Paul writes: I am thankful to Christ Jesus, our Lord, who has strengthened me and judged me trustworthy, by calling me to his service.

Jesus, Savior of every life, you shed light even on our doubts and hesitations, like the morning star that rises in our hearts.

These short readings are those read, day by day, at community prayer in Taizé. The Bible reference given indicates a slightly longer passage.

DAILY READINGS

What is the place of human beings in the universe?

The ancient world saw the universe as a three-story house. Upstairs was heaven, where God and his angels lived. Underneath there was the kingdom of the dead, and in the middle was the earth, inhabited by plants, animals and human beings. In such a universe, the importance of human beings was self-evident. Situated between the world of the divine and the created world, they were called to be mediators between the two.

Modern science has radically transformed this way of seeing. Lost as we are on a tiny planet revolving around one star among billions, in an average-sized galaxy in a constantly expanding universe, the belief that we have a central role in the scheme of things seems an absurd and pretentious claim.

And yet people in the Bible could have the same experience. In Psalm 8, someone looks at the vast night sky, filled with stars, and a cry comes spontaneously to his lips: "What are mortals that you think of them, the children of Adam that you care for them?" (v. 4). Even for that person long ago, the immensity of the universe had something unsettling about it.

In the following verse, however, the psalmist regains his composure thanks to a conviction that comes from his faith: "Yet you have made them a little lower than a god." The place of human beings in the universe comes in the final analysis from a relationship with the Wellspring of all life. God did not choose them because they were the most impressive of all beings; in themselves, frail and small, human beings are not much. Their greatness comes not from their qualities but from God's call: God chose them "to have dominion over the works of [his] hands" (v. 6).

Here we encounter another problem. The verb "to have dominion, dominate" can have negative connotations. Do human beings have the right, or even the duty, to impose their will on the rest of creation? Is it not their unbridled exploitation of the earth that has created so much damage; are we not still suffering from the consequences of this?

The verb translated by "to have dominion" refers first of all to the activity of a king. And in Israel, the king's task was not to oppress the people, but rather to ensure justice and peace in society. He was supposed to use his power so that the mighty would not crush the weak, so that harmony might reign among different groups. Understood correctly, then, the role of human beings as presented in the Bible is to use their gifts of intelligence and creativity to make the universe a home, a place fit to live in, for all beings. And in this search for cosmic peace, they have to begin by drawing inner peace from their fellowship with God, the Source of peace. Otherwise, all they will do is to project their own divisions on the world around them.

In what way should people today read the creation stories in the Bible?

It is obvious that the accounts of creation at the beginning of our bibles were not written according to the outlook of modern science. For this reason, some people reject them out of hand. Others react against this by attempting to prove that they are closer to what really happened than modern theories. Can we find a way out of what often seems a dialogue of the deaf?

First of all, the alleged conflict between faith and science finds little support in the texts themselves. The first chapter of Genesis is "scientific" in its own way, because it betrays careful observation and a love of classification. In verse 12, for example, different kinds of plants are carefully distinguished from one another, in all likelihood according to the mode of reproduction—the grasses with no visible seed, the grains with their seeds on top, and the trees with seed hidden in their fruits. But this is not contemporary science, for the biblical authors had neither the methodology nor the instruments which we take for granted.

But the true difference between the biblical accounts and a scientific study of the origins of the universe lies not so much in the method employed but in the questions that are asked. Whereas the physicists and evolutionary biologists of today are primarily interested in understanding the mechanisms by which the world and life as we know them came about and how they continue to function, the biblical authors were concerned rather to link the history of Israel and its God to humanity and the universe as a whole. They wished to confess their faith that their God was truly universal, deeply involved in the existence and the fate of all that exists.

In addition, the stories they told attempted to show how the world as we know it follows from the identity of this God. What belongs to its fundamental characteristics as created by God, and what is instead a departure from its status as God's creation? To understand our origins in this way is in fact to have a kind of blueprint for right living. The concern of the biblical authors was thus anything but theoretical. Their endeavor was part of what the Bible calls *wisdom*, the attempt to lead a life in harmony with reality.

By attempting to see in the biblical accounts of creation an alternative to scientific theories or a film on "how it really was," we condemn ourselves to disappointment. If, however, we wish to understand the meaning of our life, we can find in them intuitions that take us far. If everything in the end goes back to God, then our relationship with him gives us the key to taking part in a life which is truly significant.

News of the Pilgrimage of Trust

Four Freedoms in Middelburg

On Saturday May 13th, young adults from many parts of the Netherlands came together for the day in the city of Middelburg. Their day included prayer together, a shared midday meal and an opportunity to discover the spiritual roots of Middelburg. At 5 o'clock there was a time of prayer in the *Nieuwe Kerk* with Brother Alois and several brothers of the community who had come especially for the day. The occasion was the presentation of the Franklin D. Roosevelt Four Freedoms medals for 2006. "The Trustees of the Award believe the Taizé Community exemplifies the commitment to freedom of religion and conscience which President Roosevelt declared as an essential condition for a better world ... We note the extraordinary life of your founder, Brother Roger ... His conviction that God is united to every human being without exception and that the true value of the Gospel is enhanced by kind-heartedness is a message that none should forget." The other 2006 recipients of the award were Dr. Mohamed El Baradei of Egypt, the Director General of the I.A.E.A., "for his pioneering role in the development of international governance mechanisms for the control and restraint of nuclear weapons"; Carlos Fuentes of Mexico, "above all a committed defender of the right to freedom of speech"; Muhammad Yunus of Bangladesh, "whose leadership in establishing the Grameen Bank and in the field of micro-financing has enabled millions in developing nations to live a better life" (Freedom from Want); and Aung San Suu Kyi of Myanmar, "who has kept alive the hope of freedom, justice and democracy for her people" (Freedom from Fear).

"In you I have put my trust": Meetings in France during 2006

On December 31st at the meeting in Milan, the young French were asked this question: "How can we live the next steps of the pilgrimage of trust by creating possibilities to widen? You know that what is proposed is not to create a movement around Taizé, but to journey together as part of the Church. How can we, then, show real signs of this communion?"

Throughout this year, local stages in the pilgrimage of trust will attempt to respond to this question. On Saturday May 20th, on the occasion of the visit of one of the brothers to Grenoble, some students and other young people organised a stage of the pilgrimage of trust with the theme "In you I put my trust." 80 people came together for the meeting at half past five. After being welcomed with tea, everyone took part in workshops in the diocesan house. There were twelve themes to choose from to deepen the reflection, including "How do we dare to commit ourselves among the most deprived?", "How does art speak to us of faith? Making a visit to local churches" and "How can you live your faith in a professional environment". Nearly 250 people came for the evening prayer in the cathedral, a prayer of great beauty helped by the accompaniment of guitar, recorder, flute and trumpet.

In October, some brothers will be in Paris for an "afternoon like in Taizé" involving biblical reflection, small sharing groups, workshops, and an evening meal culminating in an evening prayer together. Around this meeting there will be also be evening prayers taking place in different towns of the greater Paris region as well as in Nantes, in the west of France. In November, meetings are planned in Strasbourg, Lille, Arras, Avignon, Manosque, Bordeaux, Amiens, Chambéry...

On the Hungarian-Slovak Frontier

There is a bridge in Esztergom linking the opposite banks of the Danube, which marks the frontier between Slovakia and Hungary. From March 24-26th, 2006, the ancient city of Esztergom was host to a stage of the "pilgrimage of trust" and several hundred young adults from all over Hungary and Slovakia, together with some from Romania, Serbia, Ukraine, Austria and Germany came to take part. Young people from Hungary and Slovakia have been meeting one another in Taizé and during the yearly European meetings for years now. As Petra recalls, "I grew up only a few kilometres away from the Slovak border, but I had to travel to Taizé in order to speak with a Slovak for the first time in my life!" The program of the three days included Bible introductions by the brothers, small sharing groups, workshops and discussions on different topics, alternating with times of prayer together. Some people say the Esztergom bridge is a parable of the age-old and complex relationship between the two peoples. It was built at the time when the countries on both sides of the river belonged to what was then the Austro-Hungarian Empire. World War I turned the bridge into a frontier post between two different states. World War II left the bridge destroyed. Then for almost sixty years the two countries could not agree on reconstructing the bridge. It was only in 2000 that it was rebuilt with the help of the European Union. "During the last fifteen years both peoples, Slovaks and Hungarians, were looking westwards first of all", says László from Budapest. "Somehow we forgot that we had neighbours close by. It seems to be more difficult to look at one another. But the bridge is here, every day...."

Complete articles: www.taize.fr/en; On every continent, Europe

Letter from Taizé

Annual subscription
Ordinary subscription: 6 (France 4,5) Euros
Supporting subscription: 10 or 20 Euros

Means of payment:

- by **credit card** *Visa, Mastercard, Eurocard, Carte Bleue*: send the number of your card and dates of validity to Taizé, and say what sum in Euros you wish to transfer.
- by **international Giro transfer** in Euros addressed to: Lettre de Taizé, IBAN: FR16 2004 1010 0700 6144 6M03 871, BIC: PSSTFRPPLYO.
- by **cheque** in Euros to Lettre de Taizé, 71250 Taizé, France, made payable through Société Générale.

In certain countries it is possible to pay **within the country**:
Australia: $12 - Letter from Taizé, P.O. Box 769, North Sydney, NSW 2059
Canada: $10 Letter from Taizé, c/o Lesley Santiago, 145 College Circle, Ottawa, Ontario, K1K 4S1.
New Zealand: $15 - c/o Jenny Chisholm, 13 Arden Way, Wilton, Wellington.
UK: £4.50 - Letter from Taizé, c/o Nick and Jane SHIELDS, 42 Blenheim Road, St Johns, WAKEFIELD, W. Yorkshire WF1 3JZ.
USA: $7 - Letter from Taizé, c/o Bruder, P.O. Box 1954, Lenox, MA 01240.
For Austria, Belgium, Czech Republic, Slovakia, Denmark, Finland, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Slovenia, Spain and Sweden, write to Taizé to ask for the address in your country.

Asia: The Letter from Taizé can also be obtained in the following Asian countries. Contributions towards the cost of photocopying and postage will be most welcome.
Bangladesh: Letter from Taizé, P O Box 48, H.P.O. 2200, Mymensingh.
Cambodia: Fr. Sri Pramong Virachai, BP 123 Phnom Penh.
East Timor:CP 299,Dili
Hong Kong: Ingrid Chan, Flat H, 14/F, Tower 125, 11 Po Yan Street, Sheung Wan.
India: Letter from Taizé, c/o Brothers of Holy Cross, 47, St Mark's Road, Bangalore 560 001.
Indonesia: Sister Be Kien Nio, Biarawati Ursulin, Jln Anggrek 60, Bandung 40114.
Japan: Isao Uematsu, c/o Yoda, 6-43-5 Shimoshakujii, Nerima-ku, Tokyo 177-0042.
Korea: English edition. Ordinary Subscription: 2,000 Supporting Subscription: 4,000 to: Letter from Taizé, c/o Hwa Gok Dong 105-51, Kang Seo Ku, Seoul 157-010.
Malaysia: Tiong Marcella Lee, No 33 Lot 201, Jalan Sg Maong Bahru, 93150 Kuching, Sarawak.
Myanmar: Youth Commission, CBCM, 292A Pyi Road, Sanchaung PO, Yangon 1111
Pakistan: Yaqub Sadeq, Catholic Church, Toba Tek Singh.
Philippines: Letter from Taizé, c/o 28 San Antonio Street, San Francisco Del Monte, Quezon City.
Singapore: Angela Lee, 79 King's Road, 268141.
Sri Lanka: Martin Costa, 31 Major Lalaka Fernando Mawatha, Kapuwatte Ja-Ela.
Taiwan: Anna Tang, Aurora Center, N° 9, Lane 71, Hang Chow S. Road, Sec. 1, Taipei, ROC.
Thailand: CYO, 122/6-7 Soi Naksuwan, Nonsee Road, Yannawa, Bangkok 10120.

Correspondence: Letter from Taizé,
Taizé Community, 71250 Taizé, France
e-mail: letter@taize.fr www.taize.fr
News from Taizé by email twice a month free of charge: www.taize.fr/taizenews.php

Directeur de publication : A. Trochard, Edition et impression : Ateliers et Presses de Taizé,71250 Taizé, France, CPPAP n° 0110K79608 - DL 1028